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Letters

Super Aircraft Carriers Are Not for the Future

To the Editor:

The Times printed an Op-Ed piece by Kenneth Jungeren [May 21] which erroneously drew the conclusion that the naval battles off the Falklands prove that the U.S. should buy more super aircraft carriers at \$3.4 billion each.

The thrust of the argument was that a large U.S.-type carrier could defeat the Argentines in the Falklands easily whereas the small British carriers were having problems.

One has to ask whether we will ever learn not to design weapons for the last war. Any new carriers we decide to build today will not join the fleet until the early 1990's and will be in service well into the 2000's. Judging what would be useful over that span of time by what would be useful today in the Falklands is quite superficial.

Technology is moving too rapidly for such a static outlook. Many of the advantages of large carriers will be overtaken by new technologies. Lighter, smaller aircraft with sophisticated missiles will supersede the big carriers' big aircraft. The vulnerability of all ships will likely increase, no matter how many layers of steel one wraps around a large ship. More importantly, building a large ship means placing a lot of value in one, sinkable platform. New techniques of reconnaissance will make it easier for an enemy to select the high-value target.

We are in an era when too much value in one ship invites its demise. The most serious problem with that is that the admirals will not commit their big carriers in risky situations when they represent so much value and we then may lose by default.

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Arlington, Va., June 3, 1982

The writer, a retired admiral, is a former director of the C.I.A.